

# JACKFRUIT: HOW WONDER CROP IMPROVED MY LIFE

By Kevine Omollo



*Clement Kotonya, farmer checks on his jack fruit awaiting maturity at his orchard in Imbo, Homabay county. [Denish Ochieng/standard]*

Tired of the fruits with more demanding care? Try jack fruit. It can be produced under adverse weather conditions," these are the words of a farmer in Homa Bay County who discovered the trade 10 years ago.

Jackfruits are not common in the African orchards. However for Clement Kotonya, the fruit has been perfect for the less productive loamy soil in Imbo village.

The area has little water supply, and is dry most of the time due to low rainfall. With no demand for farm inputs such as fertiliser, Kotonya says his experience has been stress-free.

The plant is like coffee, once it matures and it starts producing fruits, the farmer's work is to harvest, as there is no work needed," says Kotonya, 71.

## His first harvest

Additionally, jackfruits have no major challenges related to weather, diseases and pests. Since 2001, Kotonya has grown jackfruit on his four-acre piece of land. He first planted commercial jack fruits in 2014, spacing at eight metres square.

The fruits grow into huge branches, hence the big spacing is to allow them maximise on growth,” he says.

With grafted seedlings from a supplier in Migori County, Kotonya managed to plant the seedlings, and patiently care for them for three years before he could get his first harvest. During their early stages, the seedlings require watering, weed control and protection from domestic animals which feed on their leaves. To help in retaining water, mulching is done with Kotonya mostly using remains of maize plants from the farm.

Weeding is done before the plants get out of hand.

Pruning is also done to ensure it produces many branches, which would later increase surface area for fruit production. With three harvests per year, Kotonya says he earns a decent income that helps sustain his family.

Each plant produces between 30 and 50 fruits in a single harvest, with each fruit weighing up to 15kilos which Kotonya sells at between Sh300 and Sh500 each.

Today he has more than 200 plants, and is looking forward to growing more. To maximise profits Kotonya has started a fruit nursery bed. Each seedling of jackfruit tree goes for Sh100.

Though he has made great strides, a major challenge is, however, the market.

Because of this reality, I have to work extra hard to search for a market. Many a times, I am forced to move to the major markets where I sell my produce. I have, however, been negotiating for places where I can get contracts for regular supplies,” he says.

His current market is within his locality where he has clients of Asian origin.

### **More about jackfruit**

According to Food Revolution Network, jackfruit is the largest tree-borne fruit in the world, and an average size of the fruit is 10 to 25 pounds, but can weigh up to 100 pounds and grow up to three feet long.

An unripe, unopened jackfruit has a strong, unpleasant odour. But the pulp of the opened fruit smells sweet.

Jackfruit doesn't have a strong flavour on their own, so they're able to soak up herbs, spices, and other flavourings. This allows the fruit to be made into plant-based versions of shredded chicken, pulled pork or other meat-based meals.

Jackfruit can be made into a wide variety of dishes, both sweet and savoury. And the seeds are often boiled or roasted and eaten as snacks.

They are similar to chestnuts or macadamia in taste and flavour.